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AUTHOR Ploeger, Katherine
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ABSTRACT

John Swales, well-known proponent and definer of genre theory, sees the writing process as recursive as well as heuristic, emphasizing that the text is created by a writer, who is a member of a discourse community, influenced by that community's traditions, discourse conventions, textual and topic requirements and constraints. Debate among genre theorists centers on whether conscious knowledge of a genre can help writers see more within a text and as a result help them write better. Experienced writers follow a certain series of steps when writing for a new genre whereby they filter new knowledg through existing knowledge of other genres. A study examined this process by interviewing four female graduate students, two of whom had written a news story and two of whom had not. For each subject's session, which took between 35 and 90 minutes, questions were asked about the genre while it was read aloud to the subjects; after this, the subject performed a think-aloud protocol for 10 minutes in which she talked about planning to write an original piece in the new genre. Results imply that directed, guided inquiry is a useful way to help students discover all that is involved with a piece of writing. Specific questions about aspects of texts can help students expand their schemata for certain genres, which they can later use to create new schemata. (Contains three figures and five tables of data.) (TB)

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Katherine Ploeger
819 W. Roseburg Ave, Suite 132
Modesto, CA 95350
(This paper is an expanded version of a presentation given at the NCTE Conference, Orlando, FL, 11/94)

Teaching composition at:
Modesto Jr. College
435 College Ave
Modesto, CA 95350

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GENRE KNOWLEDGE IN READING AND PLANNING TO WRITE

In the past decades, we in Composition have studied the writing process, examining how and why a writer produces a text. After sifting through the theories — with the Cognitivists emphasizing the lone writer and her cognitive processes, the Sociocognitivists emphasizing the lone writer and the social influences on her cognitive processes, and the Social Constructivists emphasizing the membership in and social influences of the discourse community on that writer, a writer involved in a web of interconnecting relationships and expectations, and others suggesting other possible theories — some of us were a bit confused -- until genre theory began to explain things in a slightly different manner. John Swales, well known proponent and definer of genre theory, sees the writing process as recursive as well as heuristic, emphasizing that the text is created by the writer, who is a member of a discourse community, influenced by that community's traditions, discourse conventions, textual and topic requirements and constraints. As you can see in Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Hierarchy of Discourse Community and Genre, one thing leads to another. The discourse community has many purposes, which have many methods to accomplish the purposes. One of the methods

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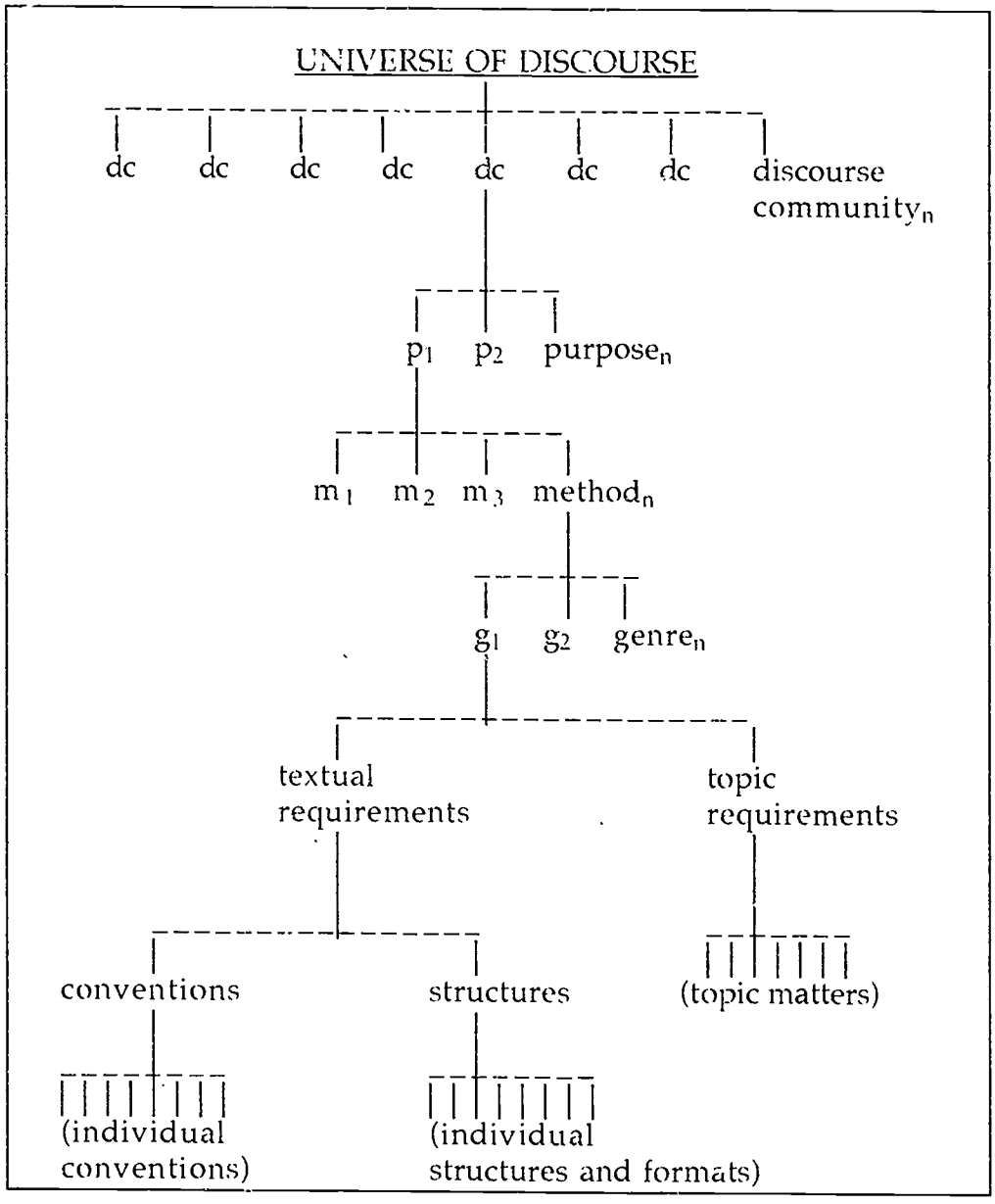
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Hierarchy of Discourse Community & Genre

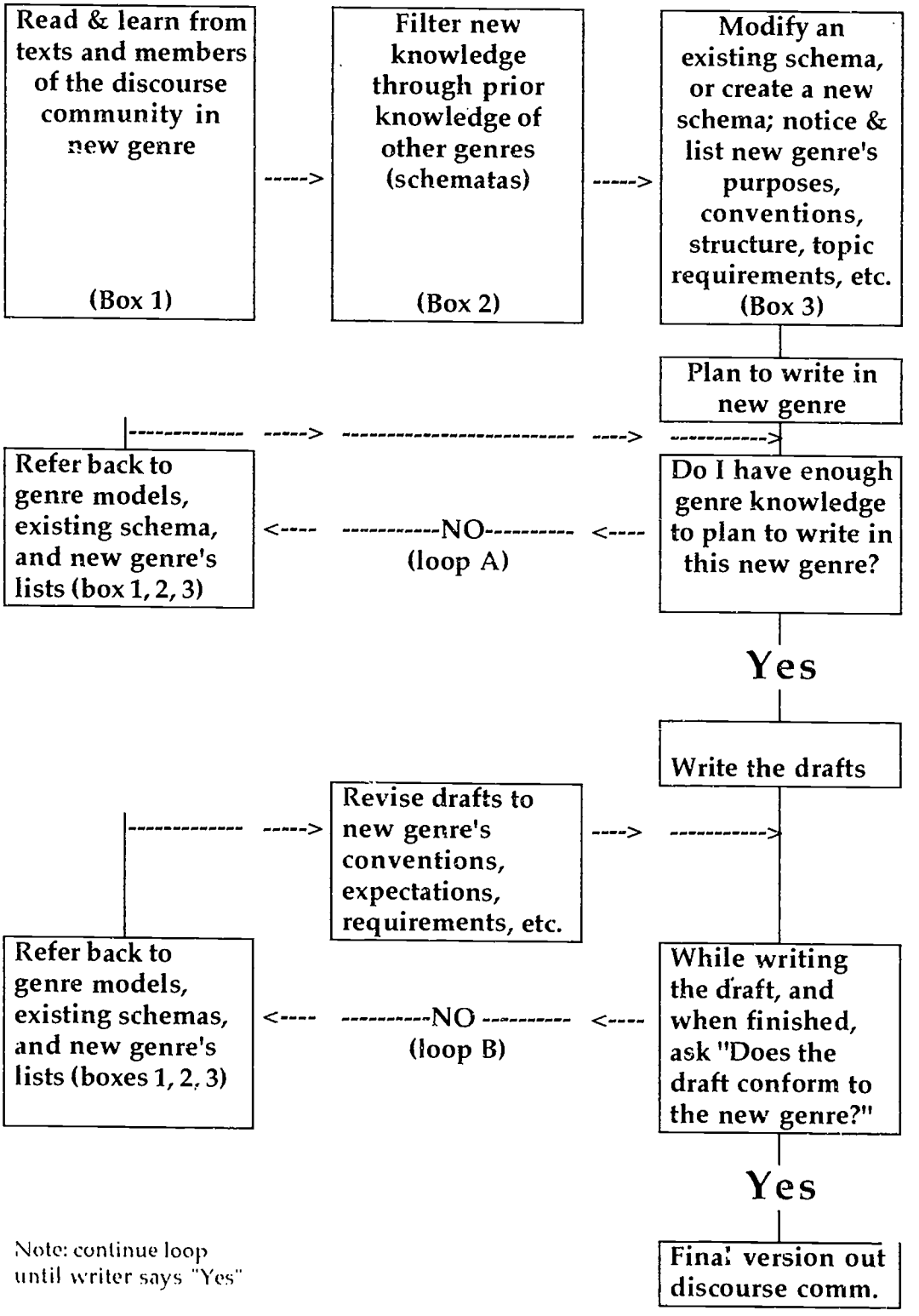


includes written discourse, or genres, which have textual requirements that include conventions and structures, as well as topic requirements. Debate among genre theorists concerns what, when and how all these aspects of text relate, and how, when, and what we should teach our students about genre knowledge, or if we should teach it at all.

Specifically, can conscious knowledge of the genre help writers see more within the text? Can this knowledge help them write better? I think the answer is "yes" to both questions, questions which prompted my research study. Some research has been done about acquisition of genre knowledge, with Freedman's October 1993 piece in *RTE* stirring up more debate, but few have studied which aspects of genre knowledge writers actually notice and use when reading and writing in a new genre. Are particular textual features or organizational structures or specific uses of language more apparent in one genre than in another? Are these aspects of the text noticed by experienced writers more so than by novice writers?

While thinking about the questions and actions experienced writers have when confronted with a new genre, or a new text type, I thought about my own struggles as a freelance writer, trying to figure out what editors wanted so I could produce selling manuscripts. I developed a conceptual framework of the cognitive processes that an experienced writer possibly goes through when confronted with a new genre. [See Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Reading and Writing Process Hypothesized for Experienced Writers when Writing for a New Genre, next page.] As you can see from this figure, Box 1 is labeled "Read and learn from texts and members of the discourse community in new genre." This is the first stage of knowledge acquisition, when the writer gathers, reads, and analyzes samples of the new genre, asks questions of veteran members of the discourse community, if

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Reading and Writing Process Hypothesized for Experienced Writers when Writing for a New Genre.



possible, trying to understand the new genre's unique combination of purposes, audience traits and knowledge, reader expectations, structure and format options, and other questions about the rhetorical situation. As the writer gathers and analyzes this information, the writer filters this new genre knowledge through existing knowledge or schemata of other, perhaps similar, genres, as represented by Box 2. A comparison takes places, with the writer trying to determine how and why this new genre is different from others encountered in the past.

As a result of this comparison, as shown in Box 3, the writer either modifies an existing schemata or creates a new one for this new genre, into which the writer essentially files all the pertinent data about the new genre, its purposes, audience expectations and traits, genre conventions, topic expectations and requirements, expected and accepted organizational structures and formats, and other aspects of the genre. Once this schemata is active, with enough knowledge to be useful, the writer begins to plan to write in the genre, and almost immediately asks herself, "Do I have enough genre knowledge to plan to write in this genre?" If the writer's answer is "no" then she returns to Box 1, 2, and 3, until she can answer "Yes" to the question.

Once that level of knowledge is reached, the writer begins to write, with prewriting and writing processes and activities usually employed. At various points during the drafting process, the writer asks herself, "Does the draft conform to the new genre?" If so, she continues to write; if not, she loops through loop B; that is, the writer returns to Boxes 1, 2, and 3, for more knowledge and revises her draft until the draft conforms to her image of the new genre, as represented in her schema for that new genre. When she finishes her draft, she asks herself, "Does the draft conform to the new genre?" Again, if it does not, then she continues looping, gathering more information, revising until the schema image and her draft match well enough. When the writer can finally say "Yes" to that final question, then she produces a final version and sends it into the discourse community.

THE STUDY

In my study, I interviewed four female writers, graduate students at a large urban university, all of whom were involved in the Master's of Composition prog am there. Originally I had hoped to find four subjects with no prior experience in either genre I selected for the genre samples. As it turned out, however, two had experience in writing one of the genre samples, the news story, so I called this pair my Experienced writers. The other two, younger and newer to the Composition program, were both good writers but had not had anything published, nor did they have direct writing experience in either of the genres. These I called my Aspiring writers. As it turned out, this surprise provided some interesting findings.

For each subject's session, which took between 35 and 90 minutes, we started with a reading protocol. After each paragraph of the sample, I interrupted the subject with a series of questions about the reading. These questions asked the subjects to focus on specific issues about the text, such as audience and purpose, handling of the topic and language. Each then answered questions about writing in the genre, as well as performed a think-aloud protocol for ten minutes in which each talked about planning to write an original piece of writing in the genre just read. For this study, I counterbalanced samples of a news story/press release and a feature article between subjects, offering one Sample A first, and then Sample B to the other subject. Both genre samples were aimed at cruise passengers/travelers, a topic I was sure all subjects were somewhat familiar with from general reading. Even though I collected data from the reading protocol, I found it yielded very little useful data. So in determining data for this study, I limited it to the questions which interrupted the reading, the writing questions, and the planning-to-write protocol. [See Figure 3 for a sample of the transcripts from the study.]

Figure 3: Transcript Samples of Carol, Sample A, Reading Question.

Comments	Coding: CATEGORY - Subcat.
KP: Why do you think the author wrote this article? / C: Why do I think the author wrote the article?	OTHER - instructions
To get more scuba divers.	PURPOSE - rhetorical
I think it's a PR person,	OTHER - personal remark
and I think, this is just my theory, to get more scuba divers to come onboard...	PURPOSE - rhetorical
or for people who think "Hey, Princess Cruises is more than eating 20 meals a day."	AUDIENCE - people
It is also, squeezing your little soon to be chubbier body into a wet suit,	TOPIC - content
and getting certified in probably beautiful blue water somewhere.	TOPIC - content
C: So, again, I think it's a PR piece,	TOPIC - refer to genre
but that is just my opinion.	OTHER - personal remark

FINDINGS

For all of the data collected, I split the talk into communication units, each unit representing one thought or phrase, or one instance of a category, which resulted in a total of 1454 communication units, as can be seen in Figure 3. These communication units were sorted into six major categories, as shown in Table 1: Communication Units by Category. First, of all the talk generated, the subjects responded most with comments about Topic, commenting about the content of the writing, and Textual matters (style, structure, etc.). These two categories accounted for the two largest percentages of response. For all subjects, Textual accounted for 37.1% of the responses and Topic with 30.3%.

Table 1: Communication Units by Category

CATEGORY	All Comm. Units	% of Total
Audience	130	8.9%
Purpose	74	5.1%
Textual	539	37.1%
Topic	441	30.3%
Process	87	6.0%
Other	183	12.6%
Grand Total	1454	100.0%

Below is a brief description of the subcategories found within the major categories, with samples from the transcripts for each subcategory.

I. AUDIENCE - who the text is intended or targeted for

- Publication - audience as defined by the publication type or an editor at a publication
  ex: "...then it could be to some kind of travel magazine..." (Carol/A/RQ).
- People - audience defined as people, with the subject naming or questioning characteristics, desires, needs, goals of people reading the text.
  ex: "...it sort of appeals to the person who doesn't just want to go on a vacation and lie there like a blob" (Carol/A/RQ).
- Reader expectations - when the expectations of the reader or the goals of the author were questioned.
  ex: "There is a little part of my reader's mind that says, "what was it that was glowing?" (Carol/B/RQ).

II. PURPOSE - what purpose did the text appear to be serving

- Rhetorical - what rhetorical mode was it using (inform, persuade)
  ex: "it sounds like, by the description, that [the author] was trying to encourage others to take the same trip" (Dawn/B/RQ).
- Refer to other genres - when the purpose of the sample or task was compared to another genre not used in this study.
  ex: "Even if this is in maybe like a travel bulletin, it depends on your purpose" (Amy/A/P).
- Other - when other purposes, other than a rhetorical mode, was named as the purpose of writing the text.
  ex: talking about her lead, "...I'm using it for a different purpose, and that is to catch interest" (Carol/A/P).

III. TEXTUAL - issues about how the text is formatted or written

- Style - comments about language usage, use of quotations, tone, directness of the writing
  ex: "It does get right to the point" (Carol/A/RQ).
- Structure - comments about organization of the text, and when specific text needed to be placed in a certain location within the text.
  ex: "Also they tell you pretty much up front (pause) what kind of an overview it's offering" (Amy/A/WQ).
- Refer to other genres - when the text in question was compared to a genre.
  ex: "Otherwise, I think it's pretty standard written press release/or, or newspaperly... you know, for a newspaper" (Carol/A/RQ).
- Constraints - when textual limits of a genre were mentioned, specifically length.
  ex: "Well, how long it should be..." (Barbara/B/WQ).
- Refer to personal knowledge - when something in text triggered a comment relating to personal knowledge
  ex: "So I think it's hard for me to comment on that because I've done it(?)" (Amy/A/WQ).

IV. TOPIC - issues about content; what is written

- Content - comments about what was written, stating specific details or commenting on support used
  ex: "...what are the outstanding things about this business?" (Amy/A/WQ).
- Refer to other genres - when the content of the sample was compare to what might be included in another genre.
  ex: talking about using a sample person, "which we often do in a feature story" (Carol/A/RQ).

- Refer to personal knowledge - when something in text triggered a comment relating to personal knowledge
  ex: "I am really bad with San Francisco history" (Barbara/B/P).

V. PROCESS - discussing tasks involved with writing

- Refer to sample - subject talked about the sample
  ex: "Okay, then this is similar (pointing to the sample)..." (Amy/A/P).
- Advice - give advice or refer to advice given to her about writing
  ex: "That's one thing I've been told, is that it's very good to have people in... studies have shown... that two people are better than one person..." talking about photographs in advertising (Amy/A/P).
- Tasks - mention tasks that must be performed in order to accomplish the goal of writing
  ex: "Yeah, [I would] get a couple of quotes" (Barbara/A/WQ).

VI. OTHER - comments not relevant to any other category

- Prediction - in response to the question asking them to predict what the author would do or talk about next.
  ex: "It looks like they're going to talk about the scuba and snorkeling program" (Amy/A/RQ).
- Instructions - ask for clarification or confirmation of instructions, repeat question, etc.
  ex: "Tell me if you need more information or whatever" (Barbara/B/P).
- Personal Remarks - commenting on how they feel about the sample, process, writing, etc.
  ex: "Ah, this is interesting..." (Amy/A/RQ).

In Table 2: Comparison of Experienced and Aspiring Writers by Category and Segment, the distribution of responses by subcategory can be seen.

Table2: Comparison of Experienced & Aspiring Writers by Subcategory & Segment

CATEGORY	Subcat'y	Experienced Reading (% of col)	Aspiring Reading (% of col)	Experienced Writing + Planning (% of col)	Aspiring Writing + Planning (% of col)	Experienced Total (% of col)	Aspiring Total (% of col)
AUDIENCE	Publica'n	17 (2.9%)	3 (1.2%)	7 (1.7%)	5(%2.7)	24 (2.4%)	8 (1.8%)
	People	29 (4.9%)	22 (8.6%)	23 (5.5%)	15 (8.3%)	52 (5.1%)	37 (8.5%)
	Reader Ex	5 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.7%)	1 (0.6%)	8 (0.8%)	1 (0.2%)
PURPOSE	Rhet'cal	22 (3.7%)	27 (10.5%)	10 (2.4%)	3 (1.7%)	32 (3.2%)	30 (7.0%)
	Other	3 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)
	Genres	2 (0.2%)	4 (0.1%)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.3%)	4 (0.9%)
TEXTUAL	Style	188 (31.6%)	74 (28.9%)	38 (9.0%)	14 (7.7%)	226 (22.2%)	88 (20.1%)
	Structure	27 (4.5%)	23 (9.0%)	34 (8.1%)	21 (11.6%)	61 (6.0%)	44 (10.1%)
	Genres	80 (13.5%)	8 (3.1%)	15 (3.6%)	3 (1.7%)	95 (9.3%)	11 (2.5%)
	Constraint	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.4%)
	Pers. Kn.	4 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (1.4%)	2 (1.1%)	10(0.9%)	2 (0.4%)
TOPIC	Content	115 (19.3%)	56 (21.9%)	154 (36.5%)	85 (47.0%)	269 (26.5%)	141 (32.4%)
	Genres	9 (1.5%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.6%)	10 (0.9%)	2 (0.4%)
	Pers. Kn.	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.4%)	10 (2.4%)	7 (3.8%)	11 (1.1%)	8 (1.8%)
PROCESS	Sample	2 (0.3%)	3 (1.2%)	12 (2.8%)	4 (2.2%)	14 (1.4%)	7 (1.6%)
	Advice	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)
	Task	4 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	55 (13.0%)	5 (2.7%)	59 (5.8%)	5 (1.1%)
OTHER	Prediction	22 (3.7%)	9 (3.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	22 (2.2%)	9 (2.1%)
	Instruction	25 (4.2%)	5 (2.0%)	18 (4.2%)	9 (5.0%)	43 (4.2%)	14 (3.2%)
	Pers. React	40 (6.7%)	20 (7.8%)	31 (7.3%)	4 (2.2%)	71 (7.0%)	24 (5.5%)
TOTALcount %ofcolumn --- % of Segment		595 (100.0%) --- 70% N=851	256 (100.0%) --- 30% N=851	422 (100.0%) --- 70% N=603	181 (100.0%) --- 30% N=603	1017 (100.0%) --- 70% N=1454	437 (100.0%) --- 30% N=1454

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Another interesting factor is seen in Table 3: Communication Units by Subjects, which shows that the experienced writers produced much more of the talk, 70%, than did the aspiring writers.

Table 3: Communication Units by Subject

SUBJECT (level)	# Communication Units produced	% of total	Group of %
Amy (experienced)	525	36.1%	70%
Carol (experienced)	492	33.8%	
Barbara (aspiring)	155	10.7%	30%
Dawn (aspiring)	282	19.4%	
Total Comm.Units	1454	100.0%	

And I found something else rather interesting when comparing these two pairs of writers, as can be seen in Table 4: Experienced and Aspiring Writers by Sample and Segment. The **aspiring** writers generated more communication units during the Reading Questions segment, when prompted to focus on specific aspects of the text, rather than during the Writing Questions and Planning segments, when

Table 4: Experienced and Aspiring Writers by Sample and Segment

Sample + Segment	Experienced Writers	Aspiring Writers
Sample A (news story)	N=517 (familiar)	N=211 (unfamiliar)
Reading	52.6%	61.1%
Writing + Planning	**47.4%**	**38.9%**
Sample B (feature)	N=500 (unfamiliar)	N=226 (unfamiliar)
Reading	64.6%	56.2%
Writing + Planning	**35.4%**	**43.8%**
Both Samples	N=1017 70% GN	N=437 30% GN
Reading	58.5%	58.6%
Writing + Planning	**41.5%**	**41.4%**

they were left alone to create their own text,. On the other hand, the **experienced** writers talked more during the Writing Questions and Planning segments when dealing with a familiar genre, bringing the percentages for each segment group to nearly to 50% each, perhaps because they had more knowledge to draw upon, and with their extended experience, they knew more about what they were supposed to do.

This trend held with the experienced writers dealing with an unfamiliar genre, as well as with Barbara, one of the aspiring writers, as can be seen in Table 5: Aspiring Writers' Responses by Sample and Segment. As you can see, Dawn held the trend, since she was familiar with neither of the sample genres. Yet Barbara showed the same trend as the experienced writers, talking more during the Writing segments for the genre she was familiar with.

Table 5: Aspiring Writers' Responses by Sample and Segment

	Barbara (% of sample)	Dawn (% of sample)	Total B+D
Sample A	Unfamiliar	Unfamiliar	14.5% of total
Read Qu	62.8%	60.2%	61.1%
Write Qu + Planning	**37.2%**	**39.8%**	**38.9%**
Sample B	Familiar	Unfamiliar	15.5% of total
Read Qu	45.5%	61.7%	56.2%
Write Qu + Planning	**54.5%**	**38.3%**	**43.8%**

Thus, if the writer knew the genre, she was able to talk more without prompts, and possibly able to create more during the writing. With unfamiliar genres, the direct questions produced more responses, so perhaps directed, guided inquiry with specific questions helping writers to focus on specific aspects of the texts can help students expand their schemata for certain genres, which they can later use to create new schemata. These questions are one way to encourage students unfamiliar with a genre to focus on particular issues.

IMPLICATIONS

From this study, I learned that if the writer knew the genre, she was able to talk more without prompts and to create more during the writing segment. They seemed to be able to tap their schemata for the familiar genre. Even so, the reading questions produced many more communication units than did the planning-to-write segment, which leads me to think that perhaps directed, guided inquiry is a useful way to help our students discover all that is involved with a piece of writing. Specific questions about aspects of the texts can help students expand their schemata for certain genres, which they can later use to create new schemata.

In addition, these questions are one way to encourage students unfamiliar with a genre to focus on particular issues, particular aspects of a text that are especially important: formality of language, jargon used, particular structures or organizations of information. We can teach our students to discover how the discourse community's needs and requirements are reflected in the text. And we can help them discover how the text serves its discourse community. These directive questions also model the process experienced writers may use to determine the pertinent facts about a piece of writing, so that they can write it themselves.

Specifically, we need to ask our students about the topic, how it is handled, what limits are placed on the written text. We need to have them focus on the text

itself, the formatting, organization, style and use of language within the piece. We need them to focus on the audience and purpose of a piece, and how that relates to the needs of the discourse community. And we need them to focus on the process of producing a piece of writing, the tasks for physical production, and the cognitive processes involved.

And just as important, we need to enable our students to connect these new pieces of writing to their own lives, to make these new genres relevant and interesting. To do this, we can relate a new genre to a genre already known to the writer. We can connect the new to something already known and familiar, something within their realm of personal experience. We need to show how this personal experience can help them learn new knowledge to help them become better writers in the real world.

FUTURE RESEARCH

I would like to expand the numbers of subjects, their levels of writing proficiency, the genres and discourse communities used in future studies. I would also like to try a survey that could be used by many subjects. Since the reading protocol itself didn't yield much data, the reading questions alone might be enough to generate some interesting data. Another future project could be to experiment with different methods of directed, guided inquiry for various aspects of genre, studying levels of success with different populations of students.

Remember Kellogg Hunt and his T-units study? He examined *Harpers* and the *Atlantic Monthly* , using this genre as the epitomy of successful adult writers, yet those magazines represent only one (or perhaps two) genres of thousands available. I would like to replicate his study on various genres, including the news story, which would give very different results than did his study. We might find that long sentences are not necessarily the sign of a skilled writer, but only an indication that

the writer can write within that genre's required standard of sentence length and complexity.

LIMITS OF STUDY

One obvious limit is that this study had only four subjects, all women, all graduate students at a major, urban university. Also, due to lack of time and statistical knowledge, potential analysis was not done, nor were actual writing samples obtained from any of the subjects.

What would I change? Now that I know the reading protocol didn't yield much data, I would try to figure out a way to conduct a survey so I could get a greater number of subjects involved. The protocols and transcripts were too much work for the time available.